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SUBJECT: TAIWAN PRESIDENT MA ASKS NODEL BERKLEY TO SUPPORT
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL AGENDA

REF: 08 TAIPEI 1588

Classified By: DEPUTY DIRECTOR ROBERT S. WANG FOR REASONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. During a February 15-20 Taiwan visit by Congresswoman Shelley Berkley (D-NEV), President Ma Ying-jeou asked for her help in achieving a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), a bilateral extradition agreement, visa waiver status for Taiwan travelers, and meaningful participation in the WHO and other international organizations. Berkley was in Taiwan as a guest of Fugen University, marking the 30th anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). As co-chair of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus, and member of the Foreign Relations and Ways and Means committees, Berkley promised to support Taiwan in its endeavors, and showed particular interest in efforts to bring gambling to the Penghu Islands.

MA THANKS BERKLEY FOR HER SUPPORT

¶2. (C) Ma welcomed Berkley to Taiwan, noting that this was her second visit. President Ma reminded Berkley that 2009 marked the 30th anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act, a ground-breaking piece of legislation which secured Taiwan's position following the break in diplomatic relations with the U.S. He thanked Berkley for her past support of Taiwan, and asked for her support on a number of issues, including conclusion of a bilateral free trade agreement, Taiwan participation in the Visa Waiver Program, a bilateral extradition agreement, and meaningful participation for Taiwan at the WHO and other international organizations.

REDUCED TENSION ACROSS TAIWAN STRAIT

¶3. (C) Ma told Berkley that there are two flash points in the region: the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. Ma said he has worked very hard to reduce cross-Strait tension and this has resulted in Taiwan's direct contact with the World Health Organization (WHO), accession to the World Trade Organization's Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) and also former Vice-president Lien Chan's attendance at the APEC meeting in Lima. Ma emphasized that Taiwan's participation in the WHO and World Health Assembly (WHA) would enhance international cooperation in this area, and sought Berkley's help in achieving that end. He said both the PRC and Taiwan understood the concept of "One China-different interpretations" and that he will not challenge that principle while he is president. Ma claimed that this concept had been confirmed between former President Bush and PRC President Hu Jintao in a phone conversation. Ma also stated he was not unhappy that Taiwan may not rank high on Secretary of State Clinton's agenda, and he prefers to keep a low profile while working to foster peace and prosperity in the area.

14. (C) Congresswoman Berkley told Ma that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi supported her trip to Taiwan, and she will report to Pelosi upon returning to the U.S. (Note: Berkley is here at the invitation of Fugen University to mark the 30th anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act.) As a former gambling executive in Las Vegas, Berkley also remarked favorably on Taiwan's plans to open a casino in the Penghu Islands, an economically backward area in the Taiwan Strait. Berkley visited Penghu briefly during her stay in Taiwan. Ma told her he had considered making Penghu a gambling area in 1996, after witnessing the success of such an effort in Niagara Falls. He said that more than 60 percent of the people in Penghu support the idea, and they will hold a referendum soon to decide on this issue.

FTA, BEEF AND EXTRADITION

15. (C) Ma reiterated his call for a bilateral FTA, and said he had experts researching the U.S. beef imports issue. Berkley said that only one FTA passed last year, and there was much anticipation as to how the Obama administration would pursue new requests for FTAs. Ma then indicated the need for a bilateral extradition agreement to quickly bring criminals to justice. He underscored an urgent need for such an agreement, citing the example of an American wanted for child molestation recently found hiding in Taiwan and many Taiwan financial criminals who have recently fled to the U.S.

VISA WAIVER FOR TAIWAN TRAVELERS

16. (C) Ma said obtaining a visa waiver for Taiwan travelers to the U.S. was important for tourism, asserting that since Japan had given a visa waiver to Taiwan travelers, both destinations have seen an upsurge in tourism. Taiwan tourists now constitute one sixth of all tourists in Japan, and Japanese tourists one quarter of foreign tourists in Taiwan. Ma also noted that the UK recently granted a visa waiver to Taiwan travelers. Berkley told Ma she will use her position on the House Foreign Affairs Committee to support Ma's efforts. In conclusion, Berkley told Ma that to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the TRA, she will introduce a resolution in the House to honor the event. Ma affirmed that the TRA was a revolutionary document securing Taiwan's future following the U.S-Taiwan break in relations.

SYOUNG